

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. **(Currently amended)** A method for isolating infection-defective hepatitis C virus (HCV) structural protein complexes from cells infected with a baculovirus encoding and expressing HCV structural proteins, comprising:

a) lysing the infected cells to yield a lysate, wherein the cells are lysed by incubating the cells in a buffer containing digitonin and protease inhibitors, wherein the concentration of digitonin is less than or equal to 0.25% and wherein the cells are lysed without sonication; and

b) adding polyethylene glycol to the lysate to form a precipitate that comprises the infection-defective HCV structural protein complexes.

2. **(Original)** The method of claim 1 wherein further comprising the step of fractionating the precipitate by gradient ultracentrifugation to provide a fraction comprising said complexes.

3. **(Cancelled)** The method of claim 1 wherein the cells are lysed by incubating the cells in a buffer containing digitonin and protease inhibitors.

4. **(Cancelled)**

5. **(Currently amended)** A method for isolating infection-defective hepatitis C virus (HCV)-like particles from cells infected with a baculovirus encoding the expressing HCV structural proteins, comprising:

a) lysing the infected cells to yield a lysate, wherein the cells are lysed by incubating the cells in a buffer containing digitonin and protease inhibitors, and wherein the concentration of digitonin is less than or equal to 0.25%, wherein the cells are lysed without sonication; and

b) centrifuging the lysate through a cushion comprising a monosaccharide, disaccharide, or polysaccharide to provide a pellet comprising a preparation of HCV-like particles, wherein said preparation contains HCV-like particles that are heterogenous in size.

6. **(Original)** The method of claim 5 wherein further comprising the step of fractionating the pellet by gradient centrifugation to provide a fraction comprising said preparation of heterogenous HCV-like particles.

7. (Canceled)

8. (Canceled)

9. (Currently amended) A method for isolating infection-defective hepatitis C virus-like particles from cells infected with a baculovirus an expression system encoding and expressing HCV structural proteins, comprising:

a) incubating the cells in a hypertonic solution;

b) incubating the cells in a hypotonic solution;

c) lysing the cells to yield a lysate, wherein the cells are lysed by incubating the cells in a buffer containing digitonin and protease inhibitors, wherein the concentration of digitonin is less than or equal to 0.25% and wherein the cells are lysed without sonication; and

d) centrifuging the lysate through a cushion to provide a pellet comprising a preparation of HCV-like particles that are substantially homogeneous, wherein said HCV-like particles are approximately 50 nm in diameter.

10. (Original) The method of claim 9 further comprising the step of fractionating the pellet by gradient ultracentrifugation to provide a fraction comprising said substantially homogeneous HCV-like particles.

11. (Canceled) The method of claim 9 wherein the cells are lysed by incubating the cells in a buffer containing digitonin and protease inhibitors.

12. (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein the HCV-like particles comprise E1 and E2-p7 proteins of HCV.

13. (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein the HCV-like particles comprise E1 and E2 without p7 proteins of HCV.

14-22 (Canceled)